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Hoosier Widow Channels Energies into Stressing Harmful Effects of Smoking to Others

Moving on with your life after losing a loved one can be a tough road to travel.

Just ask Lorene Sandifur.

Sandifur, of Kokomo, Ind., lost her husband, Gary, in 2002 to lung cancer due to smoking that had spread to his brain.

To ease the pain, Sandifur channeled her energies into telling her story to stress the harmful effects of smoking and other tobacco use. She became involved in a public awareness campaign for the Indiana Tobacco Prevention Cessation (ITPC), which included some powerful television commercials driving home the fact that smoking can lead to an early death.

Sandifur is telling her story in order to help educate Hoosiers about the seriousness of the dangers of tobacco use.

“I don’t want your wife or husband to feel the pain that I am experiencing. I hope to encourage people to never start smoking and those who are addicted, I encourage them to quit today,” Sandifur said.

Sandifur noted that so many lives are taken early due to the harmful effects of smoking.

“There are too many young people dying before they should because they thought smoking was cool,” Sandifur said.

The commercials Sandifur appears in are an Indiana version of a concept that has been very successful in tobacco prevention in other states. ITPC launched its statewide media campaign in October 2001 with ads that were created for Massachusetts and starred Rick Stoddard who lost his wife to lung cancer in January 2000.

The effectiveness of the Rick testimonial ads was proven in focus groups and with Rick’s increasing popularity as a spokesperson throughout the state. He has been touring schools throughout Indiana for the last year, telling his story and listening to young Hoosiers tell their stories about tobacco use.

Sandifur was tapped to appear in the next round of ads.

One of the commercials opens with Sandifur in her living room. The ad cuts to a photo of a healthy Gary with his car smiling. Sandifur then says, “We got married June 16, 1973. That car’s the car we got when we went out on our first date.” The commercial cuts to photos of a younger Gary and Lorene Sandifur and then photos of Gary, taken in the midst of his battle with cancer.

Lorene then says, “Gary always said that he would quit smoking when he turned 50. He would get back to a healthy lifestyle. The day before his fiftieth birthday we found out about his terminal brain tumor,” Sandifur tells the audience.

A card appears saying, “Indiana has the second highest smoking rate in the U.S.”

A second card appears, “Tobacco kills 9,800 Hoosiers, like Gary, each year.” Lorene continues, “It had spread from cancer in his lungs. I was thinking I was the luckiest person in the world there.”

The ad cuts to a final card reading, www.WhiteLies.tv. Loren continues, “Gary said he wouldn’t smoke after he was 50. He was right.”

A second ad features Lorene talking about the tobacco-themed jogging and camping gear Gary received from tobacco companies after buying cigarettes.



She talks about how Gary thought they were a bargain.

“That was before he died of cancer from smoking,” she says as the commercial ends.

Karla Sneegas, executive director of ITPC, is hoping to reach Hoosiers by having one of their neighbors tell her story.

“Lorene Sandifur is telling her story and as a result, I believe more Hoosiers will decide to quit and more young people will never start smoking,” Sneegas said. “That’s what this program is about, saving lives.”

Sandifur recently joined hundred of Hoosiers at an Indiana statehouse rally to voice her support for an

increase to Indiana’ cigarette tax and the Healthy Indiana plan. (HIP).

The House recently voted 52-44 against a 25-cent increase in Indiana’s 55.5 cents-per pack cigarette tax – the minimum increase Daniels is seeking to fund health initiatives and cut Indiana’s second-highest-in the nation smoking rate.

“I really hope this tax increase will be passed,” Sandifur said at the rally. “It will mean more lives will be saved.”

BILL WATCH

- The Healthy Indiana Plan (Senate Bill 503) will be heard on Wednesday, March 28 at 3:30 in the Public Health Committee, House Chambers.
- Currently, no amendments have been filed to SB 503. Therefore, it remains unchanged from its form when it passed out of the Senate. However, several amendments are anticipated during committee and on second reading in the House.

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